

Message Text

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ORIGIN EA-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-11 IO-13 ISO-00 HA-05 SIG-03 MMO-01

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 AID-05 OMB-01

/105 R

DRAFTED BY EA/TIMBS:DLFIELD/HA/ORM:WGMETSON/NEA/PAB:DARCHA

APPROVED BY EA/TIMBS:REFRITTS

HA/ORM:HBCUSHING (DRAFT)

EA/RA:FBENNETT (DRAFT)

NEA/RA:DRMORAN (DRAFT)

HA:JLCARLIN (DRAFT)

-----014541 041056Z /11

R 040042Z MAY 78

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 113331

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:PFOR, SREF, BM, BG

SUBJECT:BANGLADESH-BURMA BORDER PROBLEM

REF: A) DACCA 2700 (NOTAL); B) RANGOON 1508; C) DACCA 2641;
D) RANGOON 1379; E) DACCA 2198

1. U.S. POSITION: DEPARTMENT AGREES WITH REF (A) THAT
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THE USG SHOULD CONTINUE TO REFRAIN FROM BEING IDENTIFIED
WITH EITHER PARTY IN WHAT IS ESSENTIALLY A BILATERAL PROBLEM
BETWEEN DACCA AND RANGOON BASED ON A COMPLEX HISTORY.
OUR POSITION SHOULD BE ONE OF CONCERN AT THE PLIGHT OF THE
PEOPLE AFFECTED BUT WITHOUT COMMENT ON THE RELATIVE MERITS
OF THE VIEW FROM EITHER CAPITAL. WE CONCUR IN AMBASSADOR
SCHNEIDER'S APPROACH OF LOW KEY ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE

GOVERNMENTS INVOLVED TO DISCUSS THE SITUATION AND ATTEMPT TO REACH AN ACCOMMODATION WHICH TAKES INTO CONSIDERATION THE WELFARE OF THE PEOPLE IN THE BORDER AREA.

2. LONG HISTORY OF CROSS-BORDER ACTIVITY IN ARAKAN-BANGLADESH MAKES DETERMINATION OF NATIONALITIES VERY COMPLEX. MANY, IF NOT ALL, PERSONS PUSHED ACROSS BORDER, PROBABLY DO NOT HAVE BURMESE CITIZENSHIP STATUS, AND PROBABLY CAN CLAIM CITIZENSHIP OF FORMER EAST PAKISTAN, NOW BANGLADESH.

3. DEPARTMENT AGREES WITH REF (A) THAT AN INTERNATIONAL UMBRELLA SHOULD BE SOUGHT IF BDG APPEALS FOR HELP. IF PERSONS CONCERNED ARE OSTENSIBLY RETURNING TO COUNTRY OF ORIGINAL NATIONALITY, ICRC OR LICROSS (LEAGUE OF RED CROSS SOCIETIES) RATHER THAN UNHCR IS PROBABLY INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION MOST APPROPRIATE TO HANDLE THIS CRISIS. IF GOVT OF BANGLADESH DECIDES IT NEEDS HELP IT SHOULD APPEAL TO THOSE ENTITIES.

4. BACKGROUND: DEPARTMENT'S CONCLUSIONS ARE BASED ON OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE HISTORICAL SITUATION IN THE ARAKAN STATE AND THE DYNAMICS OF POPULATION MOVEMENTS. ALTHOUGH AVAILABLE INFORMATION ON THIS AREA IS LIMITED AND BASED OFTEN ON SOURCES OF UNKNOWN RELIABILITY OR LIKELY TO BE BIASED, WE BELIEVE THE BASIS OF THE CURRENT PROBLEM IS AS FOLLOWS:

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A) ETHNIC: ROUGHLY SPEAKING, THERE ARE FOUR MAJOR CATEGORIES OF PEOPLES IN THE NORTHERN ARAKAN. THE FIRST ARE ARAKANESE BUDDHISTS DISTINGUISHABLE BY THEIR PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS, DRESS, CUSTOMS AND LANGUAGE (THEY GENERALLY RESEMBLE BURMANS AND SPEAK ONLY BURMESE AND ARAKANESE). THE SECOND ARE ARAKANESE MUSLIMS. THIS GROUP IS INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM THE FIRST EXCEPT FOR THEIR RELIGION AND SOME RELIGIOUS-CONNECTED CUSTOMS (I.E. DIETARY RESTRICTIONS). THE THIRD GROUP ARE BENGALI MUSLIMS WHO WERE BORN IN THE ARAKAN. THEY ARE PHYSICALLY DISTINGUISHABLE, AND GENERALLY SPEAK BOTH BENGALI AND BURMESE OR ARAKANESE. THE FOURTH GROUP ARE BENGALI MUSLIMS WHO HAVE ENTERED BURMA ILLEGALLY IN THE LAST 10 YEARS, AND WHO GENERALLY SPEAK ONLY BENGALI.

B) NATIONALITY: THE FIRST THREE GROUPS ARE CITIZENS UNDER BURMESE LAW AND ENTITLED TO NATIONAL REGISTRATION CARDS. AN INDIVIDUAL IN THE LAST GROUP WHO ENTERED BURMA LEGALLY WOULD BE ENTITLED TO A FOREIGN RESIDENT CARD, BUT LEGAL IMMIGRATION FROM BANGLADESH TO BURMA IN RECENT YEARS HAS BEEN VIRTUALLY NIL. WE ASSUME THAT IT IS THIS LAST GROUP

THAT THE BURMESE ARE PRIMARILY CONCERNED ABOUT AND ARE ATTEMPTING TO RETURN TO BANGLADESH. BECAUSE OF THE PROBLEM OF DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN THE LAST TWO GROUPS, HOWEVER, AND FAILURE OF MANY NON-BURMANS BORN IN BURMA TO OBTAIN LEGAL FOREIGN RESIDENT STATUS), IT IS LIKELY THAT SOME LONG-TERM RESIDENTS OF BENGALI ORIGIN HAVE BEEN EXPELLED. AS REPORTED, SOME BANGLADESHI OFFICIALS ARE TAKING THE LINE THAT THOSE EXPELLED HAVE BEEN IN BURMA FOR GENERATIONS AND SPEAK ONLY BURMESE.

C) TERRITORIAL: THE ARAKAN STATE AND THE BURMA/BANGLADESH BORDER HAS LONG BEEN A PROBLEM AREA FOR BOTH GOVERNMENTS. HISTORICALLY, THERE HAS BEEN WIDESCALE ILLEGAL COMMERCE AND CHITTAGONG IS STILL AKYAB'S LARGEST TRADING PARTNER. CONFIDENTIAL

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IN RECENT YEARS, LARGE POPULATION MOVEMENTS IN BOTH DIRECTIONS HAVE COMPOUNDED THE PROBLEM. DURING THE 1950'S ARAKAN WAS THE SCENE OF A BLOODY SEPARATIST MOVEMENT LED BY RADICAL MUSLIM NATIONALISTS AND IN THE EARLY 1970'S THOUSANDS OF BENGALIS FLEEING THE FIGHTING DURING THE BANGLADESH INDEPENDENCE WAR MOVED INTO ARAKAN STATE. RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS ANTIPATHY BETWEEN THE PREDOMINANTLY BUDDHIST BURMANS IN THE BURMA ARMY ON THE ONE HAND AND THE ARAKANESE AND BANGALI MUSLIMS ON THE OTHER IS INTENSE.

5. POLITICAL & ECONOMIC: A NUMBER OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE DECISION BY THE BURMESE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE ACTION AT THIS TIME. DURING THE MARCH PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY SESSION, THE SUBJECTS OF THE ARAKANESE SEPARATISTS COUP PLOT (WITH OVERTONES OF INVOLVEMENT BY A BANGLADESHI MILITARY ATTACHE) AND ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS FROM BANGLADESH IN THE ARAKAN STATE RECEIVED ATTENTION. THE GOVERNMENT MAY ALSO BE CONCERNED AT THE WIDESCALE SMUGGLING OF RICE FROM THE ARAKAN INTO BANGLADESH NOW THAT IT APPEARS THIS YEAR'S RICE SURPLUS MAY BE INSUFFICIENT FOR EXPORTS TO OBTAIN MUCH NEEDED HARD CURRENCY.

6. EMBASSY COMMENTS ARE WELCOME ON THIS ANALYSIS AND PROPOSED USG POSITION.

7. NEW NEA ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAUNDERS CALLED ON BANGLADESH AMBASSADOR SIDDIQI ON MAY 3. WE HAD EXPECTED THAT THE ISSUE WOULD BE RAISED THEN AS EMBASSY OFFICERS HAVE ALREADY INDICATED TO THE DESK THAT THEY WERE UNDER INSTRUCTIONS TO SEEK SUPPORT FOR THE EBDG POSITION. HOWEVER, SIDDIQI DID NOT MENTION MATTER. --

8. ALL CABLES THIS SUBJECT SHOULD BE SENT FOR INFORMATION CONFIDENTIAL

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TO GENEVA TO ASSURE PROMPT ATTENTION TO PROBLEMS.
DACCA 2700 AND 2639 HAVE ALREADY BEEN REPEATED TO GENEVA
FOR INFORMATION. CHRISTOPHER

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PAGE 01 STATE 113331
ORIGIN EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 /018 R

66011

DRAFTED BY:EA/TIMBS:MMEASTON
APPROVED BY:EA/TIMBS:REFRITTS
HA:GMETSON (SUBS)

-----003859 271453Z /50

R 270352Z MAY 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 113331

FOLLOWING REPEAT STATE 113331 SENT ACTION DACCA RANGOON
NEW DELHI ISLAMABAD KATHMANDU COLOMBO CALCUTTA GENEVA
MAY 04.
QUOTE C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 113331

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REFUGEES, MOSLEMS, BORDER CONTROLS, BRIEFING MATERIALS, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 04 may 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
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Document Unique ID: 00
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Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
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Expiration:
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From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
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Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Reference: 78 DACCA 2700, 78 RANGOON 1508, 78 DACCA 2641
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 28 apr 2005
Review Event:
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Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2791737
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BANGLADESH-BURMA BORDER PROBLEM
TAGS: PFOR, SREF, BM, BG, US
To: DACCA RANGOON
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/03dd98a4-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
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EO Systematic Review
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